THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 76: THE GENDER PROBLEM

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast - a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 76: The Gender Problem. In this episode, we're going to look at the events leading up to the period of English history known as the Anarchy. During this period, some of the traditional distinctions between the genders was starting to break down. Politically, England was preparing to be ruled by a queen for the first time. Henry I was trying to end the 'all-boys club' that had been the English monarchy. And he was meeting a lot of resistance in the process. But gender wasn't just an issue in politics. It was also an issue in language. For more than five centuries, Old English had maintained the traditional distinction between masculine and feminine nouns. But now, those distinctions were also starting to disappear. English was quickly dropping the entire concept of so-called 'grammatical gender.' So this time, we'll look at the changing role of gender in 12ᵗʰ century England.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can always reach me directly by email at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com. I'm also on twitter at englishhistpod.

And last time, I mentioned that I was interested in collecting voice samples for future episodes of the podcast. And many of you were kind enough to record your accent and send it to me. I have received responses from all over the world. And I would love to have more especially if you speak with a non-standard or regional accent. So send me your voice samples either by email or by going to the Voice Samples page of the website and recording your voice there.

One other quick note. A few days after the last episode, the website for the podcast went down. There were some major problems which ultimately required me to move the site to a new server with a new hosting company. In the process, I lost most of the comments and questions which many of you left at the site over the past few years. I hated to lose those because they were so integral to the site. But the bottom line is that the site is up and running again. And hopefully, there won't be any more problems for a while.

Technical glitches are part of podcasting. And when they occur, they require time and – sometimes – money to get corrected. And that time has a value as well. So like many podcasters, I try to find the right balance between those things. One way to achieve that balance is to bring in sponsors to support the podcast. And I have experimented with that, but I prefer to keep the podcast free of advertising. The other option is to rely upon the support of listeners who enjoy the podcast and want to make sure it continues on a regular basis. And through the years, many of you have been kind and generous enough to do that.

But I have recently decided to go in a slightly different direction. I have established a page at Patreon.com for those of you want to support to the podcast. You can just go to my website and link from there. At Patreon, you can set up an account and become a supporter. And for those of you who do that, I am actually going to produce a couple of bonus episodes each month which will be available through that site. So if you are a donor or patron, you will have access to that content as well.

The bonus episodes - or Patron episodes - will supplement the material in each regular episode of the podcast, and sometimes they'll explore other aspects of the history of English. They will also allow me to jump around and explore other periods of history which are not in the strict timeline I'm following here. And the first bonus episode should be up there by the time you listen to this episode.

My ultimate goal is to keep the podcast going on a regular schedule and to keep it ad-free. And if you share that goal with me, then I invite you to head over to Patreon and become a supporter of the podcast. Again, you can go to historyofenglishpodcast.com and then just link from there.

So with that, let's turn to this episode and the problem of gender. Gender is important to our story because it was an issue in both language and society. It's probably no revelation that gender distinctions were very important in the Middle Ages. The role of men was quite different from that of women. Not only were they treated differently in society, they were also treated differently under the law. Women were generally barred from holding public offices, and their role was very limited in the Church. They might serve as the head of an abbey, but they didn't hold official positions within the Church itself. And as a general rule, if a woman held property and got married, the property would then pass to the control of her husband.

All of this created problems for the English king Henry I. As we know, he only had two legitimate children – a son and a daughter. The son William had died a few years earlier. And that left his daughter, Matilda. At this point, Henry was becoming an old king, and he was looking for a successor. And he considered Matilda to be his best option. As we saw last time, Henry got the English nobles to swear an oath to support Matilda after he died. But neither England nor Normandy had even been ruled by a woman. So there was no certainty that the nobles would honor their commitment after Henry was gone. There was a good chance that they would look for a male alternative. So that was the first gender problem.

The other gender problem concerned the language. English was an Indo-European language. And like virtually all other Indo-European languages, it made a basic distinction between all nouns. Every noun was classified as either masculine, feminine or neutral. And that classification determined the inflectional endings used the with noun, and it also determined the form of the other words in the sentence that described the noun. It was an absolutely fundamental part of the language.

These distinctions are called grammatical gender, and we no longer have it Modern English. Of course, we still make gender distinctions, especially with pronouns. But the distinctions we make today are different from the distinctions made in Old English. Today, the distinctions we make are based actual gender. But in Old English, actual gender didn't necessarily matter.

All of this will make perfect sense to you if you speak another European language or if you have ever studied another European language. But English is a bit unusual in this regard. So if you don't know what I'm talking about, let me explain how grammatical gender worked in Old English. And a good place to start is with pronouns because we still make some basic gender distinctions with pronouns.

As I've noted before, Modern English pronouns still work in much the same way they did in Old English. We not only have masculine, feminine and neutral forms like *he*, *she* and *it*, but the forms vary depending on how they are used in the sentence. So when they are the subject, we use *he* or *she*. But when they are the object of the sentence, we use *him* or *her*. So "He saw him" and "She saw her." We can't reverse those. It wouldn't make sense to say "Him saw he" or "Her saw she." We not only have to choose the right pronoun based on gender, we also have to choose the right form based on how we're using it in the sentence. Again, this is also how Old English worked, but it wasn't limited to pronouns. Nouns worked the same way.

Just like pronouns, each noun was considered either a masculine noun, a feminine noun, or a neutral noun. And those distinctions were very important, because each noun had certain endings. And the endings for a masculine noun were different from those of a feminine noun – and different still from those of a neutral noun. And even when you made that basic distinction, the endings were also different depending on whether the noun was the subject of the sentence or the object of the sentence. So the form of the noun varied just like *he* is different from *him* and *she* is different from *her*.

So let's consider an example. Take a word like *gift*. It was a feminine noun in Old English. So if you used it as the subject of the sentence, like "The gift was large," the word was *giefu* with an /oo/ ending. But if you used it as the object of a sentence, like "I gave a large gift," the word was *giefe* with an /eh/ ending. And again, these endings were completely different if the noun was masculine, or if the noun was neutral.

Now all of this seems very complicated to us today, but this is the way most Indo-European languages worked because that was the way the original Indo-European language worked. And that is the way most Indo-European languages still work today. But English is an exception. And it started to become an exception around the current point in our story.

Now English is not the only exception. Outside of Europe, these distinctions were lost within Armenian, the Persian language, and within Afrikaans which is the language of South Africa that was descended from Dutch. But within Europe itself, the distinctions have been maintained in all of the languages except English and one dialect of Swedish.

So as you can, see English is very unusual in that it doesn't classify nouns into these traditional masculine an feminine categories.

Now since grammatical gender is an unusual concept in Modern English, I should make it clear that grammatical gender often had very little to do with actual gender or natural gender. So those labels "masculine" and "feminine" can be a bit misleading. It might be easier to understand them if we just got rid of the terms "masculine," "feminine," and "neuter," and just used terms like "Class A," "Class B" and "Class C."

Take for example the words for a female. You might expect that all words for a female would be classified as feminine nouns in Old English, but that wasn't the case. The word *cwen* meant a woman. You might remember that the word *cwen* eventually became our modern word *queen*, but originally it could be used as a generic term for a woman. And *cwen* was a feminine noun.

Another word for a woman was the word *wif* which later became our modern word *wife*, but again, it was originally a generic word for a woman. And *wif* was actually a neutral noun. So it required a different set of endings.

And then we had the word *wifman* which later became *woman*. And *wifman* was actually a masculine noun. So get your heads around that. The original version of *woman* was actually a masculine noun – not a feminine noun.

And what about things that don't really have a gender at all? Like dirt. In Old English you could refer to the *earth* or the *land*. *Earth* was a feminine noun. *Land* was a neutral noun. If you looked in the sky, you would see the Sun during the day and the Moon at night. *Sun* was a feminine noun. *Moon* was a masculine noun. By the way, *day* was masculine, but *night* was feminine.

And in some cases, it isn't even clear which category a noun belongs to. Some nouns were recorded using masculines endings in one text, and feminine endings in other texts. I noted that *sun* was a feminine noun. But the word *sunbeam* was recorded as both a feminine and a masculine noun. Along the same lines, the word *westen* meant wilderness. It was recorded at various times as masculine, feminine and neutral. So sometimes, it wasn't even clear to the Anglo-Saxons. But even if you weren't certain, you still had to make a choice because you had to decide which set of endings to use with the noun.

So as you can see, these categories are called "masculine," "feminine" and "neutral," but those are really just labels used to represent different categories. They don't necessarily have anything to do with actual gender. So why do we use those labels? Why do we refer to those nouns as "masculine" or "feminine" if those terms don't really have anything to do with gender. Well, the answer takes us back to pronouns.

If you wanted to replace a noun with a pronoun, you had to use correct gender pronoun. So take the word for 'dog' which was *hund* – or *hound*. You might say "The hound chased the rabbit." But if you wanted to substitute the word *hound* with a pronoun, you had to match the gender. *Hound* was a masculine noun, so you basically had to say "He chased the rabbit." And you had to do that, even if the dog was a female dog. So nouns that required the use of a masculine pronoun are called "masculine" nouns. And nouns that required the use of a feminine pronoun are called "feminine" nouns. But again, the pronoun form often had nothing to do with actual gender.   That's why it's called "grammatical" gender, because it was somewhat arbitrary. It was determined by the rules of grammar.

But when English lost these old, arbitrary rules of grammatical gender, it replaced it with 'actual' gender. So in Old English, I would refer to a hound or dog with the masculine pronouns even if the dog was a girl because *hound* was a masculine noun. But in Modern English, I would use the pronoun form that matches the actual gender of the dog. So I would use *he* for a boy dog and *she* for a girl dog. That's how English changed – from arbitrary grammatical gender to actual gender.

Now I say that we use actual gender today, but if we look closely, we can find some lingering aspects of grammatical gender in the language. Think about ships. We usually refer to ships as *she* rather than *it*. Now in Old English, the word *scip* was actually a neutral noun. But in Latin, the word for ship was *navis*, and *navis* was feminine. So it was common to use the female pronoun for ships in Latin. And the traditional explanation is that English borrowed that use from the Romance languages. If that theory is correct, then it is an example of grammatical gender which lingers into Modern English, even though it didn't come from Old English. So we refer to a ship as a *she* and not a *he*.

But in most cases, we use *he* and *she* based on the actual gender of the thing we are discussing and not some random rule of grammar. *He* for a boy. *She* for a girl. And *it* for things that don't have a specific gender.

This change has actually simplified English, but it also means that we now have to consider actual gender in a way that Old English speakers didn't. If I don't know whether your pet dog is a boy or girl, I have to guess or just use the neutral word 'it' – which you may also find offensive. How about if I am referring to the head of a company? I can't just use a generic pronoun *he* or *she* unless I know the gender of that person. And it would seem inappropriate to refer to that person as *it*. So until I know for sure, I have to cover my bases and say "he or she" to be safe.

This continues to be a developing issue in Modern English. The rise of transgender issues has led for some to call for a completely new set of gender-neutral pronouns. For example, the word *ze* has been proposed as a neutral alternative to "he and she." And some universities, like Harvard, have formally adopted those pronouns and they permit students to use them.

There is also another option – the plural form *they* as in: "I just received a text from a stranger. They said to text back as soon as possible." This is the so-called "singular they," and it drives some people crazy, but its popularity has grown to the point that many now accept it as an alterative to "he or she."

In 2015, the Washington Post sanctioned the use of "singular they," and they now permit their reporters to use it. Earlier this year, in January of 2016, the American Dialect Society held an annual vote to select the 2015 Word of the Year. And the word they selected was *they* – specifically the "singular they." So even if you don't like it, you may have to get used to it.

To be fair, the "singular they" has been around a long time. Geoffrey Chaucer used it, and William Shakespeare used it. It wasn't really frowned upon until the 1700s and 1800s when the modern rules of English grammar were formalized. And the rule was obvious, you shouldn't use a plural pronoun to refer to a singular thing.

But there was one problem with that rule. English speakers actually had a long history of using plural pronouns in the singular. Remember the word *you*?

As we've seen before, *you* was originally a plural pronoun. We used *thou* and *thee* for the singular forms, but the plural *you* pushed out those singular forms over time. So plural pronouns do have a history of becoming singular pronouns.

And remember that the pronouns *they* and *them* aren't even native Old English words. They were borrowed from the Vikings. So *they* and *them* have already pushed out some native English pronouns. And they may end up pushing out some more.

Now, I'm not here to sanction or bless any of these changes. I just want to point out what is happening. And I want to make an important connection. The reason why Modern English is dealing with these issues is in part because English lost grammatical gender, and it replaced it with actual gender. And even though that simplified the language, it meant that we now have to be conscious of actual gender when we use pronouns.

While that can sometimes be a pain, the good news is that we don't have to worry about all of those complicated endings on nouns anymore. We basically just use the root of the noun. So we have a dog, It's always *dog*. It doesn't have a specific ending because it's a masculine noun or a feminine noun. And it doesn't matter if the dog is actually a boy or a girl. It's just *dog*. "I see the dog." "The dog chases the cat." "The cat chases the dog." So nouns are really easy in Modern English.

Now the fact that Modern English nouns don't have those endings is really important. Because most scholars think that the loss of those endings is directly tied to the loss of grammatical gender. The endings disappeared first, and then grammatical gender followed. As we've seen, inflectional endings started to disappear in late Old English and early Middle English. And those endings did a lot of work. They were partly used to make this distinction between masculine and feminine nouns. So when those endings went away, there was no reason to worry about grammatical gender anymore. You didn't have to worry about using the correct gender endings, because there were no endings. *Hound* was just *hound*. *Stone* was just *stone*. *Ship* was just *ship*. The old distinctions were lost, so grammatical gender became irrelevant. The form of the word didn't change anymore.

It only became an issue for pronouns which still varied with gender, but now the pronouns became disconnected from the nouns. You didn't have to use a specific pronoun with a specific set of nouns. Going forward, the gender of the pronoun just reflect the actual gender of the thing being discussed.

So the loss of grammatical gender was a direct consequence of the loss of inflectional endings. And that's why those distinctions started to break down around the current point in our story – during the transition from Old English into Middle English.

Now before we move on with our story, there is one other important aspect of grammatical gender that I need to discuss. And that is the impact that it had on the words that were used to described the noun or pronoun.

So far, I've focused on the actual noun itself and the pronoun that was used in its place, but this idea of grammatical gender extended well beyond those nouns and pronouns. It also affected adjectives and other words used with the noun. All of those words also had different forms which had to match the gender of the noun.

So if I wanted to say that "The good man helped me out," the words *the* and *good* had to match the gender of *man*. *Man* was a masculine noun, and in that context, the adjective *good* required an '-a' ending. So "goda mann."

But if I was referring to a woman – or a *wif* – the word *wif* was a neutral noun. So in that same context, the adjective required an '-e' ending. So "gode wif." So again, Modern English simplifies that. It's just *good*. "Good man." "Good woman." "Good child." "Good time." So again, it's much simpler today. When grammatical gender went away, those adjective endings also went away.

But what about the word *the* – the article – as in "the good man"? Well, this is one of the most obvious differences between Modern English and Old English, and it's also one of the most obvious differences between Modern English and other modern European languages.

Let's compare English and French. In French, the article has to match the noun – just like Old English. So where English just has *the*, French has three different forms – *le*, *la* and *les*. You use *le* with masculine nouns. So *chapeau* is a masculine word. That means you have to say "le chapeau." But you use *la* with feminine nouns. So the French word for house is *maison*. It's a feminine word. So you have to say "la maison."

And if you have a plural noun, you have to use *les* – so "Les États-Unis" – literally 'the states united – or 'the United States.'

Of course, Modern English simplifies all of that. Its just *the*. "The chapeau." "The mansion." "The United States."

But again, that was not the case in Old English. The word *the* didn't actually exist in Old English. And technically speaking, Old English didn't even have articles. Instead, it used pronouns like *this* and *that*.

So instead of saying "the good man," you would say "this good man" or "that good man." But here's where things get complicated. Rather than just *this* and *that*, there were over ten different forms that varied depending on whether the noun it was referring to was masculine, or feminine or neutral – and depending on whether the noun was singular or plural – and depending on whether the noun was the subject of the sentence, or the object or the direct object. So it worked

like everything else in Old English. The form of the word varied depending on all of those other factors.

The forms included '*se*, *seo*, *þæt* (thæt), *þa* (tha), *þæs* (thæs), *þære* (thære), *þone* (thone), *þes* (thes), *þeos* (theos), *þis* (this) and *þas* (thas).' And if you used a noun, you had to make sure you were using the right word. But as inflectional endings disappeared, all of these distinctions also started to disappear. English gradually settled on just a few of these.

This and *that* were originally the Old English forms used for neutral nouns when the noun was the subject of the sentence. So those two survived. But they lost all association with gender and case over time. So they became very generic. *This* was used for any noun in close proximity, and *that* was used for any noun further away. So "this dog" as opposed to "that dog." This was a new way to distinguish the two words, and it developed over time.

So we have *this* and *that*, but we don't actually have *the* yet. As I noted, there were lots of other forms – *se*, *seo*, *þa* (tha), *þære* (thære), *þone* (thone) – but no '*þe*' (/thay/) or *thee*. So where did *the* come from? Well, it came from the breakdown of all of these other forms. And it came into English at the current point in our story.

Notice that most of the forms I mentioned began with a 'TH' sound – *þæt* (thæt), *þa* (tha), *þæs* (thæs), *þære* (thære), *þone* (thone), *þes* (thes), *þeos* (theos), and so on. But there were two forms that began with an 'S' sound and, believe it or not, that's where our Modern *the* came from – from one of those 'S' forms.

Most of the forms which survived into Modern English were the forms used when the noun was the subject of the sentence. So *this* and *that* were the subject forms used for neutral nouns, and those forms survived.

But what about the masculine and feminine forms? Well, those were *se* and *seo*. *Se* was the word used with masculine nouns. So "that man" was "se mann" in Old English. And *seo* was the form used with feminine nouns. So "that cwen" – or "that queen" – was "seo cwen." So *se* and *seo* both began with an 'S'. But all of the other forms began with a 'TH' sound – *þæt* (thæt), *þa* (tha), *þæs* (thæs), *þære* (thære), and so on. So around the 12ᵗʰ century, as these various forms were breaking down, and as the distinction between masculine and feminine nouns was being lost, the very common word *se* – spelled 's-e' – started to become *þe* (/thay/) – and that was the original verison of our modern *the*. It isn't clear why that sound shift occurred, but the most obvious explanation is that almost all the other forms began with a 'TH' sound, so speakers shifted that same sound over to *se*.

So *se* became *þe* (/thay/) – or *the* as we have it today. But that little sound shift wasn't the biggest change. When *þe* (or *the*) first appeared, it was used universally, just the way we use it today. It was used for masculine and feminine and neutral nouns. And it was used for the subject and the object and the direct object. And it was used for singular and plural nouns. All of those various forms had essentially collapsed into the universal *the* that we use today. So our modern article was born – "the man," "the woman," "the children." There is no better example of the

simplification of Modern English grammar than the substitution of the simple little word *the* for all of the complicated choices found in Old English.

So I hope you followed all of that. The bottom line is that the word *the* marked a major change in the language. When it appeared, it confirmed that the old grammatical gender system had fallen out of use. It couldn't appear until all of those old distinctions were lost. So the appearance of the word *the* is kind of a big deal. It marks a major change in the language. And it first appears in extended use in the final entries of the Peterborough Chronicle.

I concluded the last episode with the year 1131. That was the year of the final entry composed by the scribe who had been maintaining the chronicle for the past decade or so. And that scribe used all of those traditional Old English forms. He use *se* and *seo* and *þæt* (thæt) and *þa* (tha), *þæs* (thæs), and so on. And he generally maintained grammatical gender, even though his use of endings was very inconsistent at times.

But the next year marked a major change in the Chronicle. A new scribe took over. And he threw out almost all of those old forms. He used the new form *the*, and he used it universally – just like we do today. And he also got rid of almost all other aspects of grammatical gender. The old complicated system was gone, and a new system was adopted. And we can see that remarkable change at this point in the year 1132.

So does that mean that the language changed almost overnight in the year 1132? Can we put a specific date on it? Well, no. Not exactly. The changes spread gradually from north to south. In fact, later texts from the south continue to maintain the older forms. So the Peterborough Chronicle captures these changes as they spreading through the East Midlands where Peterborough was located.

But even beyond that, the date 1132 is a little misleading because the final scribe's entries were actually recorded several years after that date. So let me explain.

The prior scribe had recorded his final entry for the year 1131. But then it appears that the Chronicle was put away for several years. In fact, the Chronicle was allowed to lapse for the next 23 years. And then at the very end of that period – in the year 1154 – this final scribe pulled out that old book, and he filled in the events of the missing years. So how do we know that those entries were all added at that later date around 1154?

Well, it's partly because all of the entries are written in a script that was used at a later date. But it is also because the entries skip around a lot. For example, the entry for the year 1137 is really a summary of the entire period of Anarchy in England which lasted from the 1130s through the 1150s. So the scribe doesn't really adhere to a strict time line. He jumps around. He references later events in earlier years. In the process, the scribe also got several dates wrong. In re-creating the old time line, he sometimes put events in the wrong year.

This 23-year break between the two scribes may also explain the difference in language. These final entries are written in a very different form of the language. The prior entries are considered to be Old English, but these final entries are considered to be Middle English.

One theory is that the language had simply evolved and changed that much during that 23 year period of time. Another theory is that the earlier scribe simply wrote in a more conservative style, and he tried to adhere to the traditional Wessex standard as much as he could. But this final scribe abandoned that standard altogether, and he wrote in his own dialect. Either way, we now come to some of the first passages composed in Middle English.

Now, the events recorded by this last scribe are fascinating because they cover the period of political upheaval that followed the death of Henry I. And that may explain why the Chronicle was abandoned for so many years. So let's take a look at the first entry composed by the scribe – the entry for the year 1132.

It was a short entry, and it concerned events at the Peterborough Abbey and specifically the abbot who was in charge of the abbey. I noted in the last episode that Peterborough had gotten a new abbot named Henry about five years earlier. He came from France and kept his old abbey there as well. The English clerics thought this new abbot should have given up his old abbey, but he kept both. And that earlier entry has the first known use of the word **_both_** in the English language.

Well now, in the year 1132, all of this came to a head. Henry the abbot wasted the property of the Peterborough Abbey, and he tried to force the unification of the Peterborough Abbey with the abbey in France. The scribe tells us that in doing so, the abbot betrayed the monks ("þe muneces") and he betrayed them to the king ("to þe king"). So the king ("þe king") sent after the monks ("sende efter þe muneces"). The scribe wrote that the king ("þe king") realized that the abbot was acting with treachery and deceit.

Now hopefully, you noticed something interesting there. In the first few lines, we see that the scribe is already using the word **_þe_** (/thay/) which is the early version of our modern word **_the_**. All those complicated forms like **_se_**, **_seo_**, **_þæt_** (thæt), **_þæs_** (thæs), and so on have now been reduced to the simple universal **_the_**. There are no longer variations for gender, or case, or number. And with just a couple of exceptions, the scribe continues to use the new word **_the_** throughout his remaining passages. So the word **_the_** – used as a generic article – is now in place.

The scribe then tells us that King Henry stepped in and recalled the abbot and sent him packing. The scribe wrote:

Was it not very long there after that the king sent after him.
Was it noht suithe lang þer efter þatte king sende efter him.

The first thing that stands out here is that the word order is almost the same as Modern English. Other than beginning the sentence with "was it not" instead of "it was not," the word order is the same as Modern English. But the reason why this sentence is so interesting is because the scribe just used the word **_not_** to express negativity. As I noted last time, Old English usually made a

sentence negative by putting the word *ne* in front of the verb, but the prior scribe started to bookend the verb with *ne* and *not*. *Ne* was kept before the verb, and *not* was put after the verb. That mimicked the French construction of "ne pas."

It took a few more centuries for that *ne* to disappear in front of the verb, but here the Peterborough scribe was already dropping it. He wrote "Was it noht suithe lang." *Suithe* meant 'very.' So the passage reads "Was it not very long." The *ne* had been dropped, and *not* did all the work. It would take about 200 more years before this construction was fully accepted in the south. But here, in the East Midlands, the *ne* was being dropped as early as the 12th century.

So within this first passage from the last Peterborough scribe, we see a couple of basic changes toward Modern English. The word *the* has been introduced as a standard article to be used before all nouns, and the word *not* is now being used by itself to express negativity.

Before I move on from this passage, I should note that the scribe was doing something else very interesting. In Old English, the 'TH' sound was represented with the Old English letters eth (ð) and thorn (þ). Eth looked like a lower-case 'd' with a line through it. And thorn looked like an upper-case 'P' with the loop at the middle of the stem rather than at the top. The Romans didn't use those old Germanic letters. Instead, they came up with the 'TH' letter combination for that sound, and that spelling passed into French as well.

When those French scribes arrived in England, they didn't like those funny-looking Anglo-Saxon letters. So they gradually replaced them with their 'TH' letter combination. And in this entry for 1132, we already see that spelling being used by the Peterborough scribe. For the most part, he chose to use the traditional letter thorn, but in a few instances he switched to the French 'TH.'

I mentioned earlier that the scribe used the word *suithe* which meant 'very.' It was normally spelled with a thorn at the end, but here the scribe spells it with a 'TH.'

The scribe also represented the 'W' sound by occasionally putting to U's together. You might remember that the letter U represented both the 'U' sound and the 'W' sound in Latin, but scribes were now looking for a way to distinguish the two sounds. In Latin, when two U's were put together, the first U tended to take the 'W' sound. So take a word like *equus* – E-Q-U-U-S. It was pronounced /ek-wos/ – not /ek-oos/. So that 'double U' was one way to represent that /w/ sound.

In this entry, the Peterborough scribe uses the word *wolde* several times. It's the original version of the modern word *would* – W-O-U-L-D. Each time he spells this word, the scribe uses back-to-back U's at the beginning. So he spells it 'U-U-O-L-D-E.' He actually uses that word three different times in this entry. Over time, the U-U was compressed into a single letter – called the 'double U' or 'W.' So here we see some of the first examples of that spelling in English.

So this scribe isn't just giving us new words and new grammar. He is also giving us new spellings.

So after this first entry for 1132, the scribe skips the next two years. The next year mentioned is the year 1135. And that was a very important year because that was the year when King Henry died. So let's turn our attention back to the History of England for a moment, because the political history is about to get very complicated.

Henry I had been King of England for 35 years. And for most of that time, he had also been the Duke of Normandy. Henry was now an old man, and as he reached his final years, everyone became increasingly concerned about the succession. As we know, Henry's options were limited. His only legitimate son had died several years earlier. And that left him with his daughter, Matilda. And Henry named her as his successor. But in many ways, Henry sat her up to fail.

As we've seen, neither England nor Normandy had ever been ruled by a woman. So Henry's decision to name his daughter as his successor broke with all historical tradition and precedent. At a time when gender barriers were disappearing in the language, Henry was trying to erode the gender barriers at the highest levels of government. But many of the barons were having none of it. They had sworn their allegiance to Matilda a few years earlier, they had been forced to do so by Henry. So there was no guarantee that they would stick with to that pledge whenever Henry died. And Henry probably knew that some of the barons were likely to rebel.

On top of the gender problem, there was another complication. After naming Matilda as his successor, Henry had arranged that marriage between Matilda and Geoffrey of Anjou – also known as Geoffrey Plantagenet. That marriage was part of an attempt to make peace with Anjou in western France. And that peace was necessary because Anjou and Normandy had been at war for many years. But remember that a husband usually had authority over his wife's property after they got married. And many of Henry's nobles saw that as a potential problem. Even though Matilda would be the Queen in name, her husband Geoffrey might actually take the leading role in the royal court. If so, they would end up as the subjects of Geoffrey, and they had no interest in being ruled by their rival from Anjou.

That problem became more apparent at this point in our story – the year 1135. The past few years had been relatively peaceful and stable, but Matilda and Geoffrey had grown impatient down in Anjou. In the middle of the year, they demanded that Henry turn over to them some castles that were located along the border between Anjou and Normandy. Those castles had been promised to Matilda as part of her dowry, but Henry refused to turn them over. The dispute soon led to battles between the two sides. Small-scale fighting broke out between Geoffrey's Angevin forces and Henry's Norman forces. That confirmed the popular view of Geoffrey as a rival – not an ally. And that conflict was still smouldering when Henry became ill a few months later in November.

Henry had been a strong king. He ruled with an iron fist. And he defeated many enemies in battle. But he had one great weakness – his love of lampreys. Lamphreys are small eel-like creatures, and they were considered a delicacy in the Middle Ages. Henry loved them, but they were almost impossible to digest. Henry's doctor had told him to stop eating them, but he couldn't resist. And in November of 1135, after a full day of hunting in Normandy, Henry sat

down for a meal of lampreys. Later that night, he started to have convulsions. He became mortally ill, and he died a few days later on December 1, 1135.

The Peterborough entry for the year 1135 mentions that Henry died in that year, but provides very few details. Again, this is further evidence that the entries were composed several years later. The scribe wrote that Henry was a good man – "God man he wes." He imposed law and order, and he punished wrongdoers severely. The scribe also wrote that no man dared do wrong to another in his time – "Durste nan man misdon wið oðer on his time."

In this sentence, the scribe used the word *misdon* which was an Old English verb meaning 'to do wrong.' It was literally to 'mis-do' something. Now this verb form has died out, but a related noun form has survived. If you 'mis-do' something, you commit a 'misdeed,' and we still have the word *misdeed* today. So *do* and *deed* are related Old English words. *Do* is the verb form, and *deed* is the noun form. So a *deed* is something you *do*.   And in Old English, if you *misdon* – or 'miss did' something – you committed a *misdeed*. And here, the scribe says that no one dared commit misdeeds during Henry's reign.

The scribe then gives us this sentence: "Peace he made for man and beast" – "Pais he makede men 7 dær." Notice that the scribe uses the word *dær* – or 'deer' – in its original sense as a wild animal. So *peace* was made for all during Henry's time. The key word here is the word *pais* – or *peace*. This is the first known use of the word *peace* in the English language. It was a French word, and now it makes its first appearance in English.

In an earlier episode, I noted that the Old English word for 'peace' was *frið*. And then after the Viking invasions, the Old Norse word *grið* was borrowed to mean the same thing. So up to this point, *frið* and *grið* were both used in Old English. And now, the word *peace* came in. So for a while, English had three different words for 'peace' – an Old English word, a Norse word and a French word. But notice that only the French word has survived.

There is another interesting thing about the word *peace*. There was something about it that made it very unusual for English at the time. It began with a 'P' sound. Now I haven't really mentioned this before, but in Old English, relatively few words began with a 'P' sound. And several of the words that did have an initial 'P' sound – like *port* and *palm* – had actually been borrowed from Latin. In fact, in the entire epic poem of Beowulf – which is the size of a small book – there is not a single word that begins with a P.

So why was that? Well, the answer goes back to the Germanic sound changes identified by Jacob Grimm. One of the first sound changes that I discussed in the podcast was the shift from the Indo-European 'P' sound to the Germanic 'F' sound. That's why English has *father* where Latin has *pater*. Well, that sound shift tended to occur in certain contexts. And one context where it occurred was at the beginning of words.   So that 'P' sound had been largely replaced with an 'F' sound in most Old English words. Now at the end of a word, the 'P' sound survived. So words like *ship* and *sleep* and *hop* go back to Old English, but at the beginning, the 'P' sound was rare.

13

So when a word like *peace* was borrowed in the 1100s, it probably sounded a bit exotic. Of course, over the next few centuries, English borrowed a lot of words that began with a 'P' sound. But even today, if you look through an English dictionary, you will note that most 'P' words have an origin outside of English.

Now ironically, the word *peace* entered the English language just as the peace of Henry's reign came to an end.   There would be very little peace for the next twenty years.

With Henry's death, his succession plans were put to the test. And the test quickly failed. Matilda and Geoffrey were in Anjou and, as I noted earlier, their forces had been fighting with Henry's forces along the Norman border. Matilda soon learned of her father's death. And she made plans to head to England to claim the thrown, but her rivals beat her to it. England soon had a new monarch – but it wasn't Matilda. It was her cousin Stephen.

Next time, we'll see how Stephen secured the throne over Matilda. And we'll explore the fallout that followed. Matilda never became the queen, but in many ways she won the long-term battle against Stephen because her descendants became the future kings and queens of England. So next time, we'll explore the battle between Matilda and Stephen. We'll also look at how these events were recorded in the final entries of the Peterborough Chronicle.

So until next time, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.